

Governing EU-Asia Climate Relations – by David Belis

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Shanghai air pollution sunset (Wikicommons)

Due to double-digit economic growth and related booming greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, major Asian developing economies such as China and, to a lesser extent, India have moved center-stage in all important areas of global governance. The restructuring of the global world order has a particularly profound impact on the global climate regime, as established by the 1992 [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#) (UNFCCC). Since the 2009 Copenhagen summit, China in particular has assumed a pivotal role in international climate negotiations. As a result, the relationship between China and the most active player in the climate regime, the European Union, has become a key element for future climate governance practices.

The rise of China also implies major changes for other Asian developing countries, including Vietnam. China is attempting to move away from an economic model based on infrastructure and low-end consumer goods exports, an evolution that is accelerating with the implementation of the 12th socio-economic Five-Year Plan (2011-2015). As the Chinese economy moves higher up the international value chain, major parts of its manufacturing industries are relocating towards other low-wage, industrializing countries in the region such as Indonesia, Malaysia or Vietnam. Vietnam

is particularly important in that regard because of its geographic location, sustained economic growth and relative political stability. Countries such as Vietnam will thus be increasingly important in global climate governance and are likely to join China and the other BASIC countries (India, Brazil and South Africa) as main receivers of climate mitigation and adaptation assistance in the near future. In Copenhagen, importantly, the EU and other developed countries pledged to provide USD 100 billion per year to developing countries as of 2020.

The forthcoming book *The Governance of Climate Relations between Europe and Asia: Evidence from China and Vietnam as Key Emerging Economies*, edited by Hans Bruyninckx, Qi Ye, Nguyen Quang Thuan and David Belis, looks at the topic through an empirical lens. The different chapters of the book offer in-depth and comprehensive case-studies based on first-hand evidence, from a unique relational perspective.

As the largest emitter of GHGs worldwide, China's participation in a global climate deal has become a fundamental issue. In that context, the first part of the book maps out the different issues and actors involved in EU-China relations. High-level diplomatic contacts still remain crucial, but there also exists an emerging nexus of business and civil society networks. Moving from rhetorics, discussions and talks to concrete action on the ground remains, nevertheless, an all-pervading challenge – one in which China would like to see the EU and EU agents meet their leadership position to the full extent. The EU, in turn, is more and more concerned with the environmental integrity of Chinese efforts to mitigate climate change, particularly in the context of the CDM, and the robustness of its current domestic mitigation pledges. The development of the bilateral relationship on climate change is also a function of overall domestic and international developments, not in the least due to the economic and financial unrest that has plagued the world economy since 2008-2009.

In the absence of specific EU-level instruments, the CDM constituted the main mechanism for climate mitigation assistance in EU-Vietnam climate relations throughout the 2008-2012 period. After a slow start, Vietnam managed to integrate itself in the global carbon market, with more than 100 registered projects and 6.7 million issued CERs as of March 2012. However, Vietnam's experiences with the CDM and climate policy in general have brought to light a number of difficulties, such as the need for capacity building and a sound governance structure, and serious transparency and procedural concerns. These issues are not unique to Vietnam, though, as the integrity of the CDM as a whole is often scrutinized in the academic literature and, more recently, in EU policymaking circles. As a result, current EU legislation limits the import of CERs from CDM projects registered after 31 December 2012 to projects based in Least Developed Countries (LDCs), or to countries that establish a bilateral agreement with the EU, as of January 2013. This means that post-2012 CERs from neither China nor smaller players such as Vietnam will be eligible. How this will impact EU-Asia relations on the bilateral and global level remains an open question.

The four editors are academics and/or prominent experts in the study and practice of EU-Asia relations and global climate governance. Contributions are delivered by research teams from the University of Leuven, Tsinghua University and the Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences, mutually engaged in bilateral academic research projects on EU-Asia climate governance.



David Belis is research consultant at Taishindo Services. He provides consultancy services to academic institutions and research associations. His main research areas are global climate and environmental governance, EU-Asia climate relations and urban environmental governance in the United States. Previously, he was Coordinator of the InBev-Baillet Latour EU-China Chair at the Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies and Research Fellow and Project Coordinator at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Leuven. He obtained a masters degree in Chinese Studies and International and Comparative Politics at the University of Leuven.

The Governance of Climate Relations between Europe and Asia: Evidence from China and Vietnam as Key Emerging Economies will be published under the [Edward Elgar's Leuven Global Governance Series](#) in early 2013.

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